



sequoya review

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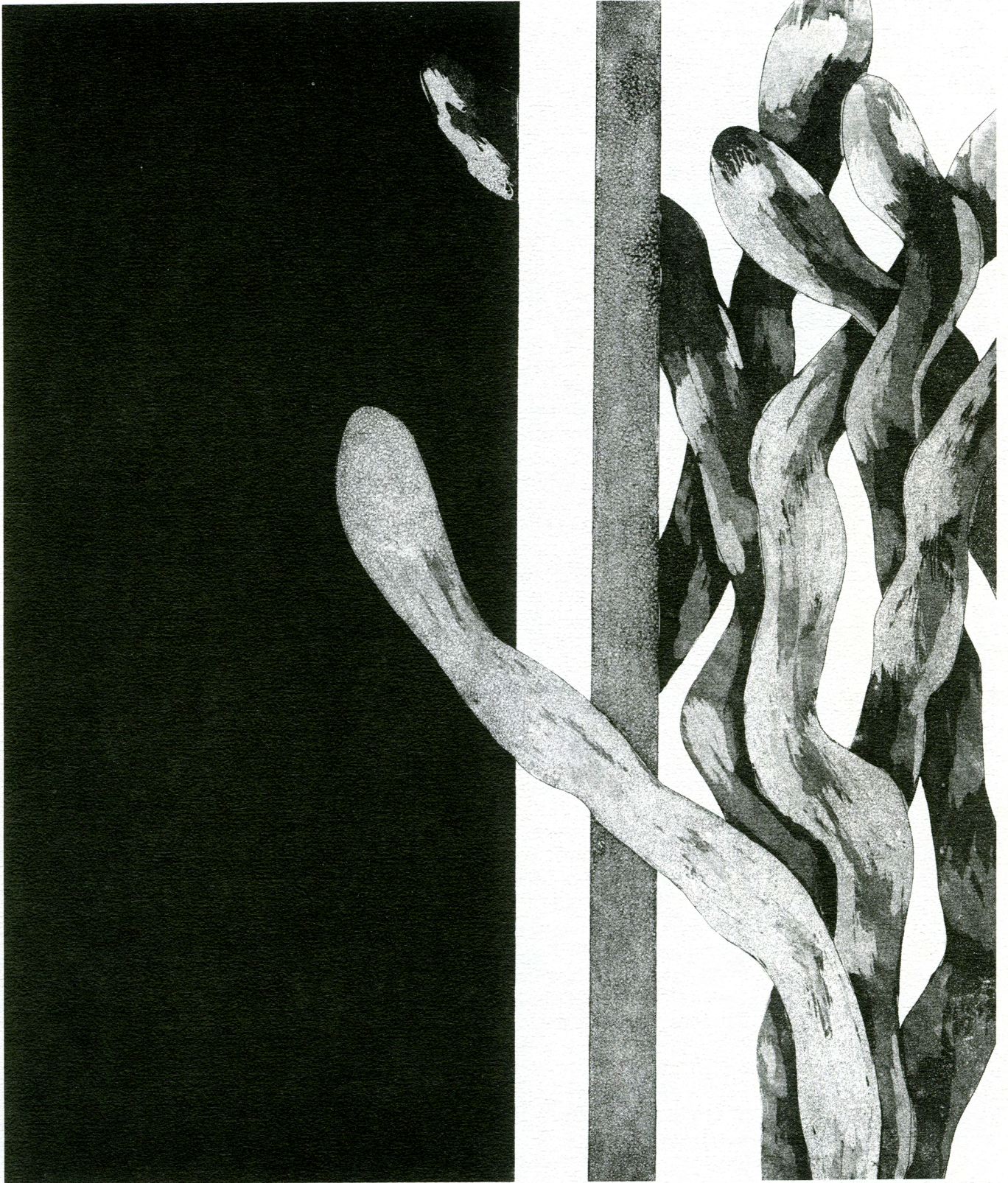
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The Skies and Where They Take Us

Nights, you dreamed life for the constellations,
tried to show me how the sky out West
would be different, how here
it puts you off balance, as if the moon could play
on the tiny hammers and anvils of the inner ear,
setting us on or off our feet with the tides.
You told me you spent six weeks washing eighteen-wheelers
in Norfolk Virginia-- my hometown-- and I knew
you weren't impressed. But I could show you something.
Ten miles out of the city, heading for North Carolina,
the Lake Drummond Causeway loses itself
in the Great Dismal Swamp. In high school,
I drove out every weekend, turned off my lights,
and watched dead trees holding their branches against the sky,
raising them in the kind of praise I once saw
in a picture of a man and woman dancing,
holding their arms above their heads,
greeting the sky and whatever gods they saw there.
In winter, no place on Earth is so dark,
and it's easy to believe the legend of an Indian woman
who lost her lover to the quiet of the marshes
and spends eternity poling her flatboat silently,
her lantern swinging cold light over colder water.
Now, on a bridge over a river in Vermont,
I imagine how cold this water would be if,
in a fit of something close to sanity,
I jumped in and truly believed you would follow.
You told me that stars have lives
much like our own, and deaths that surpass
whatever feeble leaving off of breath
we can manage to announce our passing,
but would the stars, our metaphors for each other,
be this afraid of speaking? In Vermont,
the hills are everywhere, and above them,
the sky has our eyes. I remember hearing
that a company in New Jersey will sell you the stars.
What more could I ask? For fifty bucks,
they'll name a constellation after you,
put you up with Orion the Hunter, the two bears,
and all the other lives we give to the sky
to comfort us, to hold us, to call divine.

-Shannon Smith



-Sandra Burke

Shauna

The whole restaurant went black and I said, "Shauna?"
in alarm, and with a great hope, and I dropped
my lettuce knife and ran to find the switch,
knowing I'd find Shauna on the floor again,
her water broken, her skirt soaked to her legs,
Shauna sobbing--I wanted to deliver her
myself with my clean sandwich-maker hands.
Jeff the cook had slipped and hit a switch
as he fell. When Shauna fell last week,
in the back by the produce fridge,
she knocked over the light and piped at us
for five minutes before the busboy
and I ran back to drag her up.
Shauna's as pregnant as anyone gets--
she can pile more plates on her trays
than the other waiters, because the trays
brace on her stomach. Some of us try
to brush against her as she goes past,
in the rush; even the manager touches her
at the waist when he speaks to her.
Oh Shauna. She so happy, you should see her,
she holds her stomach like she's won a prize,
she's convinced the busboy will be a rap star,
she thinks I'm smart, she asks me why creole
mustard is called that, she's wanted to know the French
spelling of mayonnaise so she can write that on the menu.
I can't believe how far I've fallen for this girl.
Today some workmen lopped branches from a tree
near my window, and on my way out I heard a woman say,
"That's the ugliest tree I ever saw, for a tree."
God knows what she meant, but for me it meant Shauna:
she'd see herself that way, she's beautiful
in the way that trees are never ugly.
A few months ago, I'd have seen that baby
as part of a lopping off of Shauna's limbs. You see,
she's blonde, she's not out of high school,
she was married four months ago to a boy
named Ramirez. But then, she's a good waitress,
can carry a list in her head, she'll carry
a heavy bustray if there's need. Sometimes
when I'm making a sandwich, I know it'll be perfect,
and when it comes off the grill, say a reuben sandwich,
utterly crisp and melted inside, I send it out
with Shauna, and I know what the customer does--
she smiles a little and delicately turns it over
and bites into the part I've cut so straight.
I can't imagine making anything I'll ever do, I swear,
be as perfect as that sandwich, as perfect as Shauna
when the busboy found her laughing in the dark after she fell.

-Cathy Wagner



-Fielding Freed

Life's Fast

Maybe you feel like the cowboy trying to catch his first
Train. He put on his spurred boots, his hat with cracks
Made by sun and wind, and his gloves admirably
chafed from riding and roping cattle. He got on his horse,
Laid his good strong rope on the pommel,
Brought along his gun.

The train was coming.
You could see it breathing blackness
Into the sky from its mouth shaped
Like an upturned bell.
He decided to frighten it into stopping:
Ran out in front of it, and like an elephant
Stood tusk-to-tusk with his opponent. As the thing came
Too close, he fired a shot. Promptly, the train passed over him.

The cowboy got up feeling
Incredibly put down. Though, this would not stop him.
Now, with renewed courage, he followed the train,
And saw his chance, as it began
Climbing a steep hill. He lassoed the monster
By its bell-shaped mouth, hoping to choke it. He hopped
onto its back and managed to slow it down until,
From deep down inside there came voices (the train's
Conscience) that rumbled, as they
Called out, "More wood! More wood!"
Like a spider attached to its own thin thread, he felt himself
Doomed by his own doing, as he was thrown
Into the air, falling
Forward over the mouth that breathed
Fresh blackness on him. Promptly, the train passed over him,
Continuing its course downhill.

It stopped after a time, and when the cowboy climbed
Out from under it, to his surprise he was in town. A man
Had seen everything from his window. He went to the cowboy
And pointed his finger. "The train," he said, "it's supposed to
Work for you. It got me here to town. Ask someone the next
Time, and see you around."

-Laura Nien-Hwa Ch'ien

Drive in the Dark

-for Katy

At the Davy Crockett truckstop
in Greeneville, Tennessee, you can get
beer, omelets, chicken, showers.
The peach pie is hot, the truckers
even sleepier than we are, and we don't speak.
I watched you sleep while I searched
for radio stations, exit 23, the first arms
of the sun, felt I was going somewhere further
than Greeneville, driving you, friend,
towards safety, the way my own mother
always drove me home. From the placemats
we learn that Crockett's father
couldn't make it as a farmer, or as a miller,
so opened a tavern. I imagine Crockett working
late, holding out at 3 AM for that last man,
who needs that last drink, those last moments
to tell about his wife, his children,
before the door shuts to the wind
and he's back outside, alone with only
the hills and his horse to talk to.
We listen over our shoulders to the talk
of the truckers, and I think of Crockett and the stories
he must have heard, and how we laugh at him
now, as if he's a sort of comic book hero,
whose history is only suited to souvenir
stands, Encyclopedia Britannica, laminated
placemats. Every drive like this reminds me
of the long last hauls with my father
back from national parks with Indian names
like Algonquin, Sequoyah, back to the suburbs,
whisked away from the wild and its calm.
All the hours on those trips I was nervous,
not really knowing why, wanting my father
to like the music I chose for the radio,
wanting our conversations to be closer,
to end in conclusions.
Now asleep you can't know what this means,
this long drive in the dark. When I was young,
on sweet July vacation mornings,
my brother and I were lifted sleeping from our beds
into the backseat of the old Plymouth, and wouldn't wake
until we were already in Harrisburg,
to find wheat fields and silos whizzing by.
I experiment with speed, try eighty, look
at you sleeping, think better of it;
there's Crockett, there's my father, there's you
to think of, friend, we're almost home.

-Millie Bentley

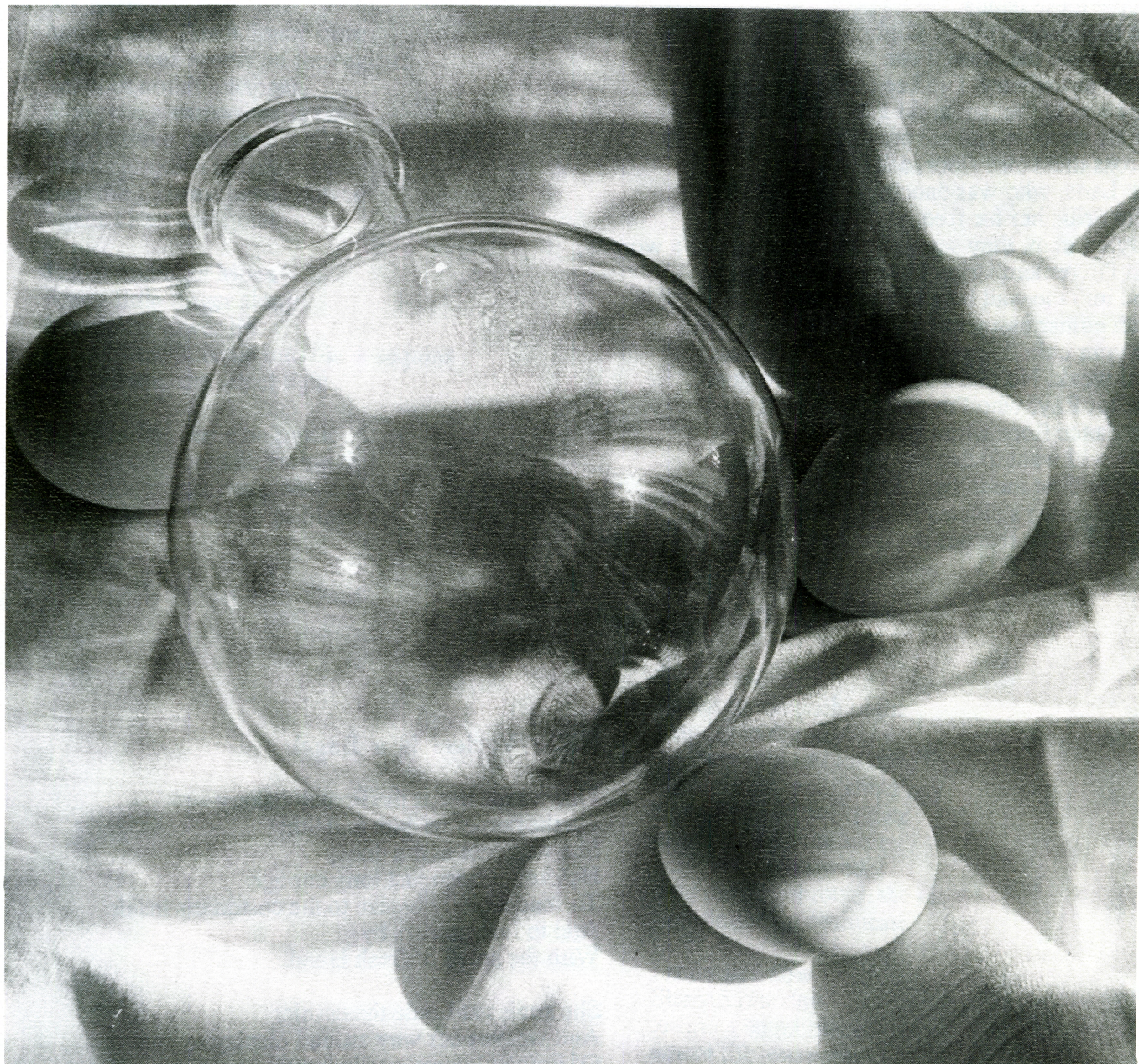
Unlocking the Door

Our hero, the mouse, chews another wire in two.
The night watchman sighs up from his seat
And, pulling his hat on slowly, investigates.
He doesn't notice the sign that said "Alarm"
Has been changed to "Motel,"
Lit now, bright red, and flashing.

Tromping up the staircase, he doesn't notice
The paintings, the sculptures of the masters
Are marvelous portraits of mice:
"Thinking Mouse," "Whistler's Mouse,"
"Mouse with a Blue Guitar."
The watchman won't see these, but we do,
Just as we see the mouse there in the corner,
Laughing so hard his tail stub aches,
His dark glasses have fallen off.
That mouse has written this poem; he knows
What's going to happen.

He knows the guard will open the next door,
And instead of seeing the gallery he expects,
There will be the woman of his dreams,
Her grey fur smooth, long ears laid back seductively,
Beckoning as she lies there, naked, on the bed--
Our mouse thinks this hysterically funny--
And the watchman will undress
To make love noisily, hastily,
But before he will reach the bed--
The mouse screams, he can't help it--
The room will turn, and spin, and tumble
Its way up through the clouds,
Never, never stopping.

-Greg Delisle



-Lynn Howard

Ray

Listen, you won't be sorry you left.
I told myself Honey, go on up
and rub yourself on that man
like a good bed. I figure,
I have these hands,
the bloneness of my thighs,
I can lie in the grass, I can
bite a strawberry, I've been to Disney World.
Ray was at the bar, and I laid my hand
on his sternum and we prayed
across the dance floor, ask anyone,
ask Lana, who was dancing with that dentist
who drills her for free, ask the band.
Ray's a man, they say, to make me glad I'm a woman,
but I'm remembering how he used to grind
you into the wall here till you smiled
with embarrassment and admitted to his hand
on your chin that you were glad to be a woman
and weak. No one's surprised you're gone,
except Ray, who I'm pushing around
the dance floor with my hips.
Ray will want to drive my Honda home,
and he'll let me in first. I'll slide
to the driver's side as he's walking round,
and when he reaches the door, my heel will be ready.

-Cathy Wagner

Nikki Vericci is a Bagel

I have seen her at the French bakery
On the corner of 44th and 9th;
She wanders in the door,
Holding it open just long enough
To send a chilly breeze to the customers inside
And to lure passers by
With the smell of fresh bread.

She smiles at Louie the cashier
And weaves her way around displays
Of French loaves, garlic loaves, croissants and crêpes.
Sometimes she lingers for a moment
By the cream-filled pastries,
And looks over her shoulder
At the busy bread-hunters.
Then she disappears into the bagel section
And returns with a white paper bag
Filled with the smell of her own self.

-Yvonne Hart

Mona at Midnight

It's noon
at the Party Town liquor store
where Mona works on the register
watches nothing happen
along the summertime street
except three men on the curb
holding bottles in hands out
past their knees, heads bowed
against heat and quiet.

But at midnight Mona
runs a little finger along
her glossy lower lip
and shakes fantastic into black sequins
that burst in the street light..

Trees hustle come on music
at three men in white wing tips
and wide bright ties elbowing
each other, grinning at Mona.

-Ruzha Cleaveland

Rachel

did the twist
on the moon each night
singing to the sky
and wearing my favorite mask.
It's ugly on you, she'd say
and laughing, we'd race
each other up the stairs
her small, willowed
legs moving through the air
with feline smoothness.

I miss her now.
She left one day
to find a better place
where life and pain
don't go hand-in-hand.
It's good that she smiles
in my memories
and I think of her
on nights when the moon tilts forward,
I know she's dancing
on the other side.

-Latonya Dargan

Thank You Science

Einstein knew that happiness could be extracted from the bark of the Pacific Yew. He told only his friends. Ah, Einstein. Energy, mass, the speed of light: stars moving towards us are blue, moving away-- red.

A woman in Kansas sees blue halos around people who will die soon. She never looks in mirrors. Her hair is arranged by feel.

'Polar bears are better insulated than thermos bottles or high voltage lines. Researching polar bear fur, my father calculated its R-value (107) and found three identical snowflakes in the same day. Imagine the odds. In his car, my father likes to pretend that he's a pirate. He puts a pen, or a screwdriver between his teeth and grins, one eye shut, at other motorists. If you see my father, pretend to be afraid. Say something nautical, anything but "mark twain" or "anchor" or "blue moon's a sailor's boon".

The woman in Kansas is my mother, only the halos are red and she has to close her eyes while drinking water, or while washing her face. Her hair was messy before she could see death.

Hurry now, there are three Yew trees left.

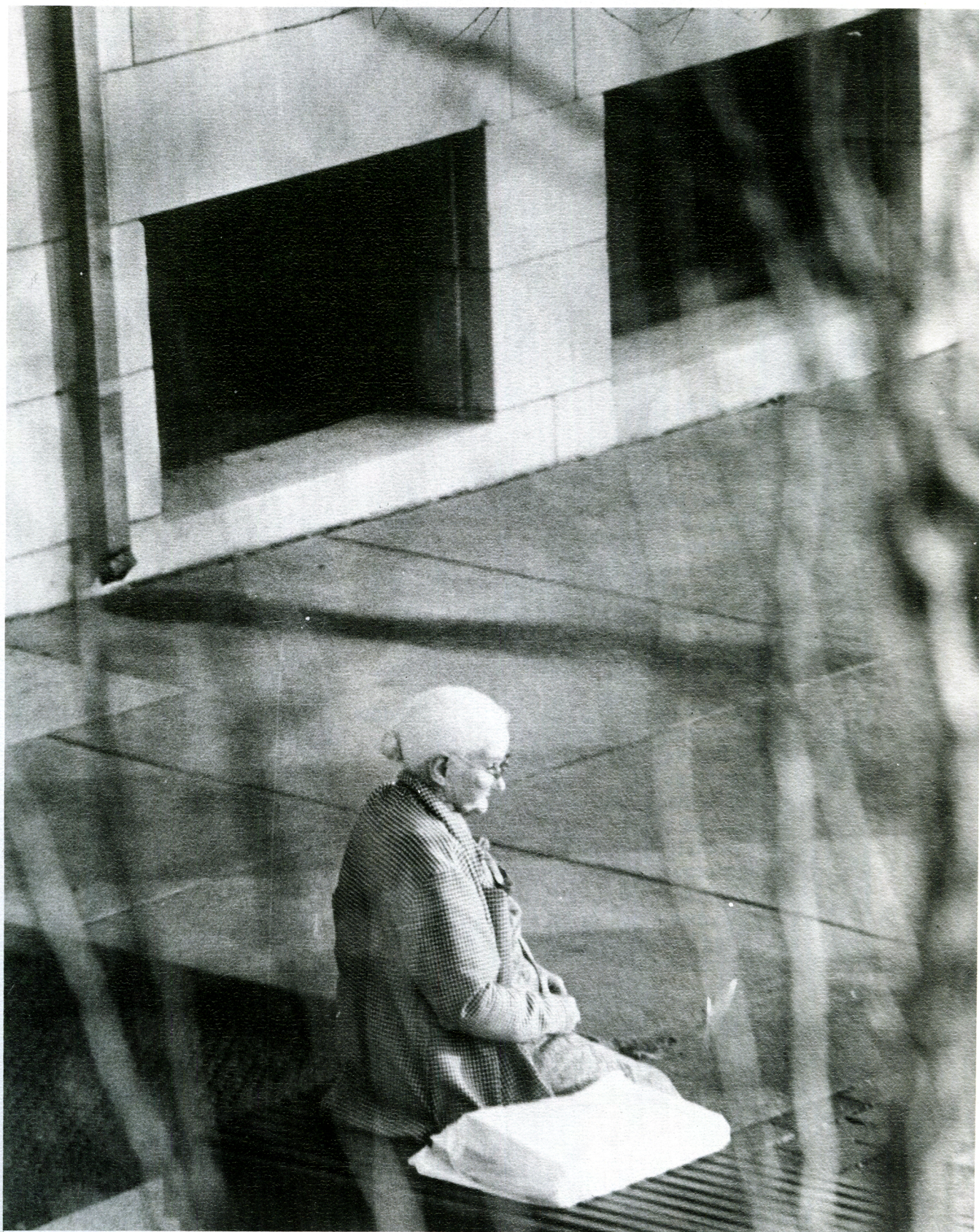
-Richard Seehuus

Full Landscape

for Billy Joe Rook

Small things are what we take from house to house, what settles our lives: books we read as children, mirrors we were held up to, before our understanding of what it means to face ourselves, to see our lives shining back at us. I'll never know what things came to you as a child, what was given away for lack of room. Your mother trims her plants. The cut leaves dry, fade like memories, like a boy's treasure of snake skins, brittle shells of tissues found in the grass. Your memories took a different route, lifted like wind in the trees, as your father took your family from state to state, churches calling him to practice his faith like a precise and musical instrument. You adapted to the moves the way the roots of plants will stretch to touch the sides of terra cotta pots. After all, we carry around what we are on our backs like a shirt, learn to depend on the things that allow us to move, a faith your mother would say, that friends are waiting in the next neighborhood, that each curve of highway promises another town, another view. Where your parents live, we notice cows grazing on the bony brows of hills, the strength of shade trees, the moon rising, pale cupped hands from behind hills. Such a light watches over the valleys, sees the full landscape, how each hill leads to another, how each fence, or tree line, or garden edge is not permanent, not a line begging stay.

-Laurie Perry



-Lynn Howard

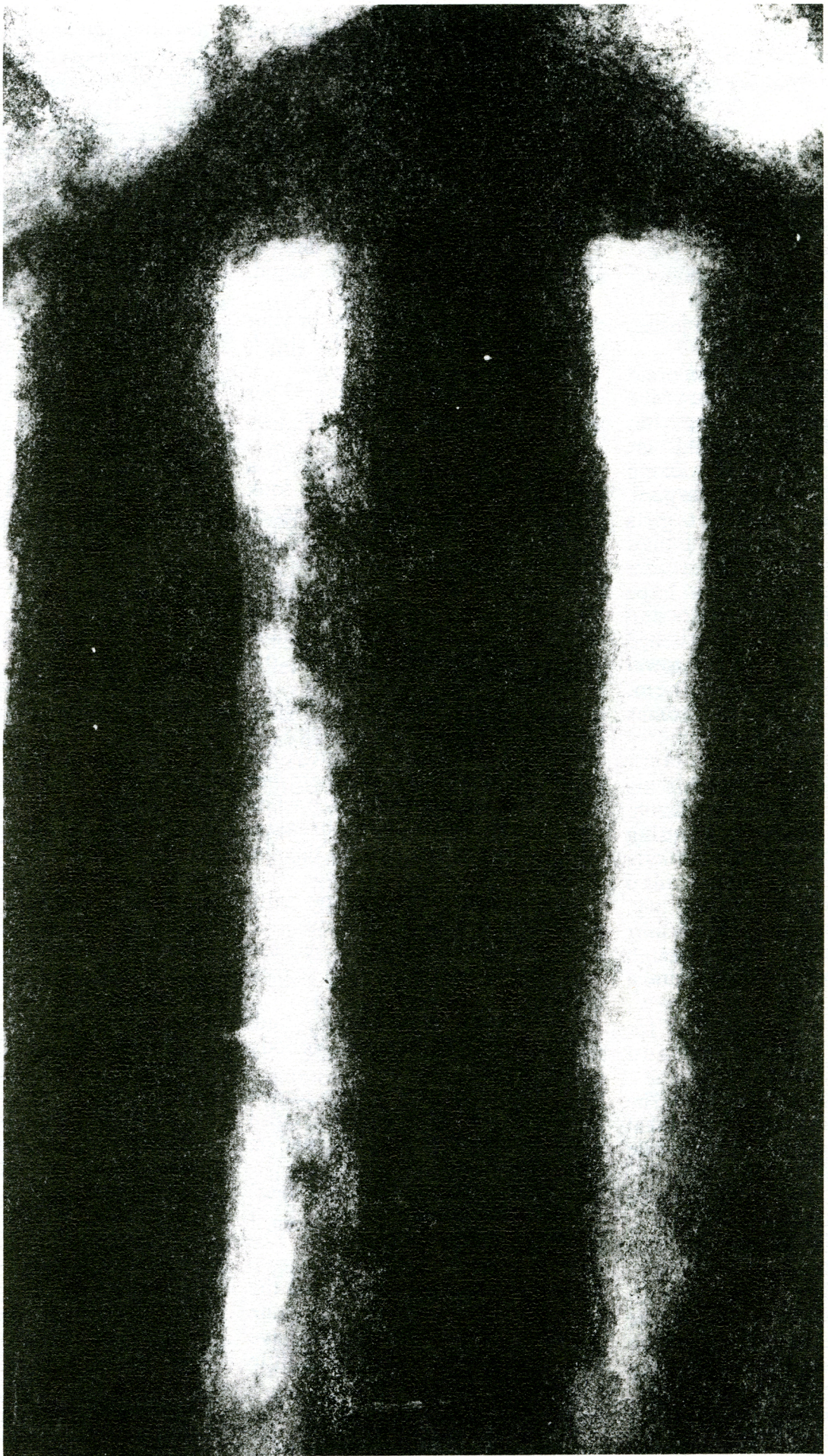
The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus

(1958-1959) Salvador Dali

Everything depends on his step
up from the sea and onto dark
new ground. The Virgin watches
from her seat in his standard pole,
her robes becoming his banner.
Smiling, Pope Annulus waits
to embrace young Columbus,
waits to offer his thanks and a token
from the Vatican. Christ hangs
from His cross in the clouds,
nodding His head in approval--
recalling calmed seas and simple fishermen.

Just down the beach, in Christ's own shadow,
five crewmen chase each breaking wave
arms flapping in imitation of Sandpipers,
the first they've seen in a year. They stop
to watch their captain's gait
slow as he approaches the sand,
slow until his first dry step
is ponderous and high, knee nearly
to his chest. So ceremonial, so like Columbus
that the men turn their naked backs
laughing loud and hard with a confidence
that comes from solid ground.

-Richard Seehuus



-Ron Buffington

EMERALD

by Michael Langley

"My goodness, she's bigger than I am," Mrs. Hicks said.

Thomas shielded his eyes from the glare, hoping to improve his view.

"Me too. And I had nothing at fourteen," Chrissy said.

"Don't worry," Thomas joked, "neither did I."

They were watching Emerald Shields climb the ladder out of the pool, adjusting the top of her dripping swimsuit. Behind her, other kids from the city day camp splashed and screamed in the pool. Beside Thomas the older girls sunned or played cards in a tight circle. Beside them were the older boys, gathered around a huge radio, playing frantic guitars and drums in the air. They all watched Emerald pass and place her towel on the grass beyond them. Satisfied all was well, Thomas drifted off to sleep.

Cold drops of water hit his chest and ran down his stomach. He awoke to Emerald standing over him and combing out her long wet hair. Mrs. Hicks's and Chrissy's seats were empty. Drops of water gleamed on her legs. She ran the comb through again, sending a fresh spray down on him.

"Hey, show some respect for your elders." He smiled and shielded his eyes.

"You don't look that old." The sun hit the deck in such a way that her suit and legs were bright while her face was in shadow.

"I'll have you know I'll be eighteen our last day of camp."

"You're only seventeen?" She sat in Chrissy's chair.

"For two more weeks."

"I can't wait till then." She closed her eyes and tilted her chin toward the sun. Her wrists hung loosely over the armrests.

"You're looking forward to my birthday?"

"Hardly, I'm waiting for the end of camp."

"And why is that?"

"I hate tennis camp."

"Then why are you here?"

"Because my mom's a bitch. She wants me out of the house." He was struck not so much by the conversation as he was by her voice. It was rough, from deep in her throat, but a pleasant sound. Like winds near the ocean.

"I'm supposed to monitor your language, young lady." He shook his finger.

She frowned and examined her arms for tanning. "Why can't I be in your group?"

This was not the voice of a fourteen year old. She didn't look at him when she asked but leaned forward resting her elbows on her knees. She didn't attend to the top of her suit. This was not the body of a fourteen year old. She looked toward the large women in the distance splashing water on frightened babies.

"Mrs. Hicks says you belong in Chrissy's group. She's in charge." He spoke absently, his gaze held to the line where her brown skin abruptly became white halfway down her breasts. Cathleen's aren't close to this, he thought.

Still looking away she said, "Chrissy and Hicks hate me. All the girls think I'm a slut because I've had more boyfriends than they have."

He could believe she had. "Come on, Emerald. Nobody hates you."

"I'm not a slut." She turned sharply to him. He stared intensely at something he found on his armrest.

"Excuse me," Chrissy's nasal voice came from the sunlight. "I believe that's my seat." She leaned down and put two brimming cups of iced-tea on the deck. When Emerald was gone she said, "Be careful, I might have to tell Cathleen. Oh! That little bitch got my seat all wet."

It was days later, lunch time. He had been trying not to look at her

too often and had stopped the boys from chanting "boom-boom" every time she moved to a ball on her court. But he saw her then, standing beyond the courts and the circles of campers reaching into their brown bags. Her hands rested on the handlebars, and she leaned her head to one side as she spoke to the boy on the motorcycle. Thomas was there in seconds.

"Emerald, you need to go talk to Mrs. Hicks right now."

"Why?"

"Just get over there now."

"Fuck off," he thought was what she'd said under her breath. She turned to the boy on the bike. "Oh well, bye." Her voice was honeyed, much softer than normal. "Give me a ride sometime."

"I will." The boy chewed slowly on a chocolate bar, watching the way she moved away. Get your greasy eyes off her.

Thomas recognized him from high-school. "How's it going, George?"

George spat onto the tree. His saliva was heavy and brown from the chocolate.

"Pretty good job, huh," Thomas continued, "watching a bunch of screaming kids go to the pool and play tennis all day?" Did this guy cruise the city parks looking for little girls to impress?

George put the last of the chocolate into his mouth and chewed loudly.

"Sorry, man," Thomas went on, "these damn camp regulations. You can't ride in the park with all these kids here. It's stupid, I know, but it's my damn job." He touched the left handlebar. "Cool bike, though."

"Fuck off, McCarthy." George said, bringing his foot down on the starter. It didn't catch. "And my name ain't George," he said, coming down harder. Thomas backed away from the gasoline smell and choking noise.

Days later, towards the close of the camp session, Thomas sat with Emerald on the hood of his

mother's station wagon. They were alone in the park except for a man pushing a cart laying down lines on the baseball diamond. The last of the other children had been picked up. Mrs. Hicks had left to get her own son and Chrissy had left to make her shift at Bloomingdale's.

"Sorry you ended up having to wait," she said quickly, her head tilted so her chin touched her collarbone. He'd almost forgotten about her voice.

"Well, I am missing *The Flintstones*," Thomas said.

"That's a stupid show." In the distance the man rolled the fresh chalk down the third base line. "Is Cathleen pretty?"

"I guess she's all right. How did you know about her?"

"Chrissy told me." Thomas wished Chrissy wouldn't talk to the kids like they were old friends gossiping at lunch.

"Is your mom coming from a long way off?"

"We live in the first house over Ellington Bridge."

It wasn't a long way. Thomas recalled a friend he'd played with years before from that area. His mother wouldn't let him ride his bike there alone. "What's mom up to that she's so late?"

"She's probably screwing her new boyfriend."

"Emerald."

"Camp's over. I can say what I want. He's an asshole."

"Maybe you're not giving him enough of a chance." He couldn't believe he was saying this. He sounded like a school counselor but he wanted to say something.

"Last night he came into my room and said we should be friends. He pushed me against the shelves, my radio fell. He started breathing heavy and rubbing himself on me." She looked like she'd bitten into something sour.

"Jesus." He imagined her shrinking from this man, the radio crashing to the floor.

"I told you he was an asshole."

"Did you tell your mother?"

Emerald's laugh frightened him. "She says he's an affectionate person. I told you she hates me."

Thomas studied the tennis ball in his palm. "I don't think she really hates you." What did he know about her mother?

"She does and I hate her."

"I bet deep down your mom loves you. And you love her." Was this him? Where was this stuff coming from?

"No," she whispered, "I love you."

"What did you say Emerald?"

"My legs are tanner," she blurted, extending them slowly from the hood.

Did she say she loved him?

"Is it really that bad with your mom?" Why didn't he let this die, say something about his legs not being able to laze in the sun every weekend?

Emerald tossed her hair and stood up, the car swaying without her weight. She looked at him, her lips set tight, her hands set at her sides like a woman about to perform a difficult dive. He'd led them to something serious. She lifted her t-shirt to her ribs. First he caught the white flash of her bra, then he saw the bruises, aligned like three purplish clouds.

"She hits you?"

"She got pretty mad when I told her what he did." Emerald let the shirt fall and dropped onto the grass at the parking lot's edge.

He couldn't turn back. "What happened?"

She stared toward the baseball diamond, running her tongue quickly over her lips. He recalled her sitting next to him at the pool, her breasts. "It was her and Johnny's six month anniversary. He brought over a gun for a present."

"A real gun?" He felt like an idiot as soon as he asked it.

"I told him it was stupid. Who would want to rob us? He said there are a lot of creeps in this world and he likes to protect his women."

Thomas slid down to the grass beside her. "What did you say?"

"I told him I wasn't his woman, that he was a disgusting, fat pervert." She tore furiously at the clumps of grass beside her as she spoke.

"That's when your mom..."

"Yeah," she laughed. "she happened to have a pot handy." Her lips began to tremble. "She said I asked for whatever I got, walking around the house in shorts and nighties. She said I went around like a little whore."

"What did you say?"

"It's my house too. I told her she was a big whore." She closed her eyes hard and shook her head to stop the tears. "All they do is fuck. He never takes her anywhere. I can't even turn up the radio anymore. He's in there panting like he's going to die." She was shaking with tears and he put his arm around her shoulder. "She calls out 'you're killing me, you're killing me.' I wish he was."

"It's all right," he brushed the hair from her eyes. "It's all right," he said again and it occurred to him how appallingly easy his life was, how trivial. Would he break it off with Cathleen before leaving for school, where would he drink with the gang that night, what new shirts would he get his mother to buy him? Gradually the girl he held stilled and she lifted her head from his shoulder. Her hair was tangled on her forehead and her eyes were swollen.

"Kiss me."

Kiss her? He moved his face nearer to hers, not knowing whether it was to kiss her or to say, "I can't. You're only fourteen."

She pressed her lips tightly against his.

"I can't," he turned his head and let his arm fall. A horn blared twice and a big brown car rolled to a stop in the lot. He watched like a child or a drunkard, her door slamming shut, the platinum blonde woman behind the wheel with the pink tank-top and enormous breasts, Emerald's wave, the skin hanging loosely

from her mother's upper arms as she steered the car into the street.

Later that afternoon, Thomas hit the ball hard against the backboard, hearing the satisfying echo it made when it struck the wall and came back to him. Any indication of child abuse was to be reported immediately to the camp director. That would be the last thing Emerald would want. What the hell would Mrs. Hicks do? He switched from forehands to backhands. Would she confront Emerald's mother? He hit the ball harder. What would he do when Mrs. Shields mentioned he had had his arm around and was kissing her daughter? Had she seen?

He caught the ball and sat down, leaning against the chain-link fence around the practice walls. His racquet lay beside him and he wiped the sweat from his forehead with the sleeves of his t-shirt. She'd said she loved him. Kiss me, she'd said. He tried to recall the kiss. He imagined kissing her more firmly, forcing her head to tilt back. His mouth still on hers he would rise slightly, so she could slide under him in the grass, sharp and strewn with tiny rocks kicked in from the parking lot. He would run his hands over her tensed thighs, over the pointed bones of her hips, inside her shirt onto the cool skin of her stomach. She would rise enough for him to lift her shirt slowly above her raised arms. He allowed himself to look at her full breasts; his finger traced the line left by her swimsuit. He leaned over to kiss the bruises.

"No, those aren't yours." she said, pulling him away by the hair.

She covered her chest with her t-shirt and turned, offering him her unmarked back. A terrible surge ran through his arm as he brought down his racquet, edge on, striking her lower back as she laughed.

On the last day her mother was late again. Thomas and Emerald sat on the bench beside the courts,

amid the strewn paper cups and plates. Emerald reached into her yellow gym-bag and drew something out.

"Happy birthday." She dropped it on his lap. It was a child's toy wristwatch. Beneath the cracked face was a smiling monkey, one arm pointing forever to seven, the other to three. The band was faded orange plastic.

"It doesn't work," she said. "My dad gave it to me when I was little. We sent away for it. Mom got really mad because we ripped up all the cereal boxes in the house and went out and bought more till we had enough. We had to have cereal for dinner."

They both laughed. Did her father die or just go away? Thomas didn't ask.

"Emerald, I shouldn't take this." He didn't deserve it.

"You have to." She pulled at her lower lip with her thumb and forefinger. "Please, you have to."

He should have hugged her. He was afraid to touch her at all. "Thank you. This will be my favorite present."

"What about Cathleen's?"

"She's just taking me to dinner and bowling with my friends." Thomas fingered the watch band.

"Oh, have a good time," she said, looking toward the empty baseball diamond.

The horn blared twice. He squeezed her hand. "Take care of yourself."

Coming out of the men's room, Thomas heard the ball slam into the gutter and saw the girl who dropped it nearly topple over, laughing. Even with a birthday's worth of beer in him, Thomas knew before she turned it was Emerald. Cathleen and his friends were at the other end of the alley, just starting to bowl. The boys on the lane watched Emerald move in her black mini-skirt. George, or whatever the hell his name was, pulled her onto his lap at the scoring table. Thomas could not hear what he said to make the others laugh but he did see George

start to slide his hand under Emerald's skirt.

Before he realized what he was doing he had Emerald by the arm and was threatening to kill all the long haired boys on Lane 17.

"You ain't at camp no more, McCarthy."

"It's okay. I'll be back," Emerald said as they all stood up. Her voice was slurred.

He had no idea what he would do if the boys followed them or what lies he would tell Cathleen and the others later as he pushed Emerald through the back entrance into the quiet of the parking lot.

They waited silently in her driveway. The house was dark. She refused to go in until sure her mother and Johnny were done inside. Her face pressed against the cool window and she sat heedless of her skirt. A car rushed past. It's okay if we just sit. Minutes later she lay against him, breathing regularly. He clenched the steering wheel and let her settle. It's okay. Her hair tickled his neck and her chest rose evenly. Her legs were tucked so that her green and red bowling shoes pressed against the passenger door. How could she be asleep?

The dark shape on the neighbor's yard nearest him became a car on blocks under a tarp. A breeze blew a newspaper up against it. He recalled her upraised arms, his lifting the shirt.

She'd been kissing his neck for seconds. He turned to kiss her and she raised up to meet his lips. Immediately she was alive, arching into him. His head bumped into his window. Her tongue moved wildly in his mouth, her hands pulled at his shirt-tails.

"No." he pushed her off him, frightened.

"It's okay. I've done it before." Her hand reached into his hair.

"No, we can't." He turned to his window and watched a truck roll loudly over Ellington bridge. "They're asleep by now. You can go in."

"I love you."

"Please Emerald, go to bed."

"You love me too. I could tell when we kissed."

Oh, God. She's fourteen. "Look, I was half-asleep. I didn't know what I was doing."

She leaned back against the passenger door. "You did know. You've thought about it since you saw me. I saw how you looked at me at the pool."

So did everyone, didn't they? Things were falling in, he had to get away. "Emerald, get out of my car."

She leaned forward to kiss him, and he pushed her off too hard. The terrible surge of his fantasy shot through his arms.

"Thomas."

"Get the hell out of my car, now."

"You love me."

"I don't love you. You're a little girl. I don't have time for little girls."

She didn't shoot herself with Johnny's gun like she'd threatened to, collapsed and crying on her front yard when Thomas drove away. It was more than a year later that she died. He read about it in the local weekly paper his dad sent him at college so he could keep up with the news at home. In the same edition there was an article on his old tennis team. It looked like a promising season. She was with three community college boys who ran their car into a tree outside of town. They'd all been drinking and the article suggested there may have been drugs as well. Sometimes irrational thoughts flew into Thomas's head. You killed her. It's your fault. You should have taken her, protected her. The thoughts he could dispel; he could stash them away like the broken toy watch in his drawer. It was the memory of her beautiful windy voice, her words, "You love me," that kept coming back. Perhaps they were always there, he thought, like a dull pain, like a hardly noticeable ticking.

-Michael Langley



-Teet Rich

Saniya's Dreams

In the year I shared a room with her,
I would ask my sister
To let me smell her hair
And run my fingers through it.
It was long and black
And shined like a new piano.
She would comb my hair
And tell me how I was prettier than a girl.
One afternoon in May we went to a photographer
And took a picture.
She showed it to her friends and told them
How she was the daughter of Haroon Ar-Rasheed
And I was her slave boy,
A gift from Charlemagne in exchange for a clock.
She told them I was an angel
Who descended with Gabriel
To teach Solomon how to speak to the Nightingale.
But I refused to return to heaven
Because I fell in love with her, Queen Sheba.
She said I was prettier than Joseph
And she was Al-Aziz's wife
Who kept me beautiful with a potion
She had brought from the magician who mummified King Tut.
On her wedding day,
My sister placed the picture in her jewelry box.
She kissed my cheek and begged me not to grow.
I talked to her yesterday on the phone.
She said she still kept the picture
And shows it to her children.
She tells them when I was her slave
I ran away on a ship to Marseilles
Where my mother lived.
From there I was sent
To the Court of Ferdinand and Isabella.
They gave me to Columbus who traded me for gold to the Indians.
The Indians had no use for me.
They needed neither angels nor slaves.
My sisters tells her children
That I am now settled on the east bank of the Tennessee
And that I auctioned my wings and chains
When I ran out of rent money.
My job is selling flowers to strangers
And at night I dance with women
Who cannot pronounce my name.

-Khaled Mattawa



-Fielding Freed

Spider

There's a spider in my stomach.
Sometimes I can feel him crawling
around and I'm scared he'll bite.
I believe that you put him there,
slipped him into my drink when he was
very small. Now he can keep me
company while you're gone.

You dance with your new lover
in the second story room where peach
sunlight leaks in through curtains.
A ceiling fan blows down on you and
on the wooden floor still wet from rain.

The heat here is dry and empty and I
can think of nothing but you and
the spider. He's furious because he wants
out. He's breathing hot air inside my belly.

-Matt Cory

The Static Stone of Sleep

Sometimes the T.V. snores in empty static,
but this late, it's more like a child with one eye open.
Every so often, you see true snow,
air wave dreams and memories,
news from the day before.
The pictures are fast. In one,
a farmer heats his face over a candle
straining to see through flame, a vision.
His chicken coop is in the old world style,
two walls stone, two wire.
A boy crouches behind the stone corner,
clutching a rock, his eyes expand to the light.
Of only you were awake now.
What static are you seeing?
How fast do your memories move, and move on?
The farmer turns a page of the book,
his grandfather's. He hums.
Couldn't you just keep one eye open?
I want to show you how easy it is to stay awake--
wake up, I'm trying to talk to you.
The boy creeps forward.
His eyes the blind edge of white, the farmer flies,
straight through the roof, over the garden--
there's a boy by the wall--
into the body of a rooster. He blinks,
looks around, the boy staring back,
his arm jerks-- the rock--
here it comes, catch it.

-Greg Delisle

Moment Between

She thought he had
An exhilarating carburetor.
He drove her past pink Zion,
Past pink ferns, but
There was more to life
Than a good carburetor.
She fingered her slick
Talisman and lit another
Joint. She was about
As chaste as Gypsy Rose Lee
And the pungent Navaho
Beside her couldn't tell
A fire hydrant from a hole
In the ground, lost
in his rollercoaster high,
An acceleration ramp freedom,
A certain weird eeriness
Like an empty back seat
While driving at night.
They made quite a pair,
Lying in the tangy incense
of exhaust fumes, shielded
By the ferns. An old lady
Walking her Pomeranian
Along the interstate
Saw them nude. She threw
Dry cheerios at them
And gave the rest
To her dog.

-Michelle Lynn Lilly

Car Poem

At seventy miles per hour,
you know a line break matters.
Reading on the highway,
you've got to snatch what you can
between glimpses out the rearview--
the ripped tire, diesel fuel emotions.
You could be coasting through
a villanelle, glance up, and your lane is ending--
it's construction you have to worry about here,
a huge flashing arrow pointing you the right way.
At the toll you can rev up a whole stanza.
Try for the second and some housewife
surrounded by groceries will lean on the horn
stressing its long, jolting syllable.
You're on the road and a poem
can take hours to move you.
When you're finally getting somewhere,
traffic thins, and it's too dark too read.
The inside light flickers
like a weak image and is no help.
In the darkness you compose your own
poems. The stalled trucks are like,
say, beached whales, who didn't
get there looking for their mates
but from a sort of recklessness,
an unswerving attention to the moon,
a complete misreading of the tides.

-Michael Langley





-Fielding Freed

This Thread

I want to tell you about this thread:
this fraying cotton thread
caught casually on the stem
of my apple;
this same thread that raveled
from the white cotton shirt of
a Jamaican apple-picker
whose dirt-brown arms moved
like a dancer's to the swell
of his native song;
the song that winds in and out
of the branches,
like warp through weft of the
shirt now damp with sweat,
like this thread wound around
my apple stem.
I want to tell you
how this thread unravelled from that shirt,
how it was woven into song,
how the song wrapped around the branches,
how it twisted through my apple-stem,
how it became my thread,
my song.

-Jenni Brown

History of Facial Features

My Negroid lips
came with a caravan of slaves
Belonging to the Grand Sanussi.
In Al-Jaghboob he freed them.
They settled in the poor section of Benghazi
near the hospital where I was born.

My eyebrows came
On a ship of Greeks who migrated to Tokara
To grow olives, and grapes for their wine.

My eyes arrived with the army of
Uqba who conquered Barqua
In the name of God.

In 1531,
The Knights of St. John invaded Tripoli.
The residents of the city
Called on their brother Turks.
The Turks brought along my nose

And my hair belonged
To a concubine of Ciptimos Cifiros.
She made him breakfast
And bore four of his children.

-Khaled Mattawa

The Sculptor

for Julie Warren Martin

Under ground she knew as yard,
street or woods, coral rouge marble
ran in veins. Beneath her sleep and play
it waited for the child to learn
the differences in bark of trees
or layers of rock along the highways
of East Tennessee. Downtown she noticed
sand stones of river bottoms
show themselves in slabs of sidewalk,
and the marble buildings, slick
as her mother's porcelain sink. These
are the surfaces that called her to work,
chip and polish, reduce stone to a thought,
insisting the stone itself would be enough
to lead her hands. She recalls her father
working wood into chairs and tables. Her own
hands never afraid to follow. The coral rouge,
so fragile, no longer quarried, but left
to wait patiently in the backyards, beneath
our schools and favorite stores. It waits
like our past, to have something done with it,
by hands brave with skill and tools.

-Laurie Perry

Dance of the Blessed Spirits

I remember listening to her play the piano
envying how her long painted fingernails
seemed to dance on the keys.
She would run her hands through her hair
when she made a mistake.

Sometimes when she played
its was easy to imagine another place.
I remember her playing Glück's "Dance of the Blessed Spirits"
and thinking of how the Aztecs
buried musical instruments with their dead.
What is the music of the dead?
Maybe the silence that is so hard to listen to.
I pictured the deep, cold underground burial tunnels
with pictures and carvings so vivid and ornate
they seem to sing and dance themselves.

Maybe I am there too, listening to the silence,
not sitting on the earth above her,
running my own hands through my hair,
and I can almost hear the piano,
I can almost feel her long fingernails
run through her hair as she makes a mistake.

-Amy Jackson

The Wave Nature of Buicks

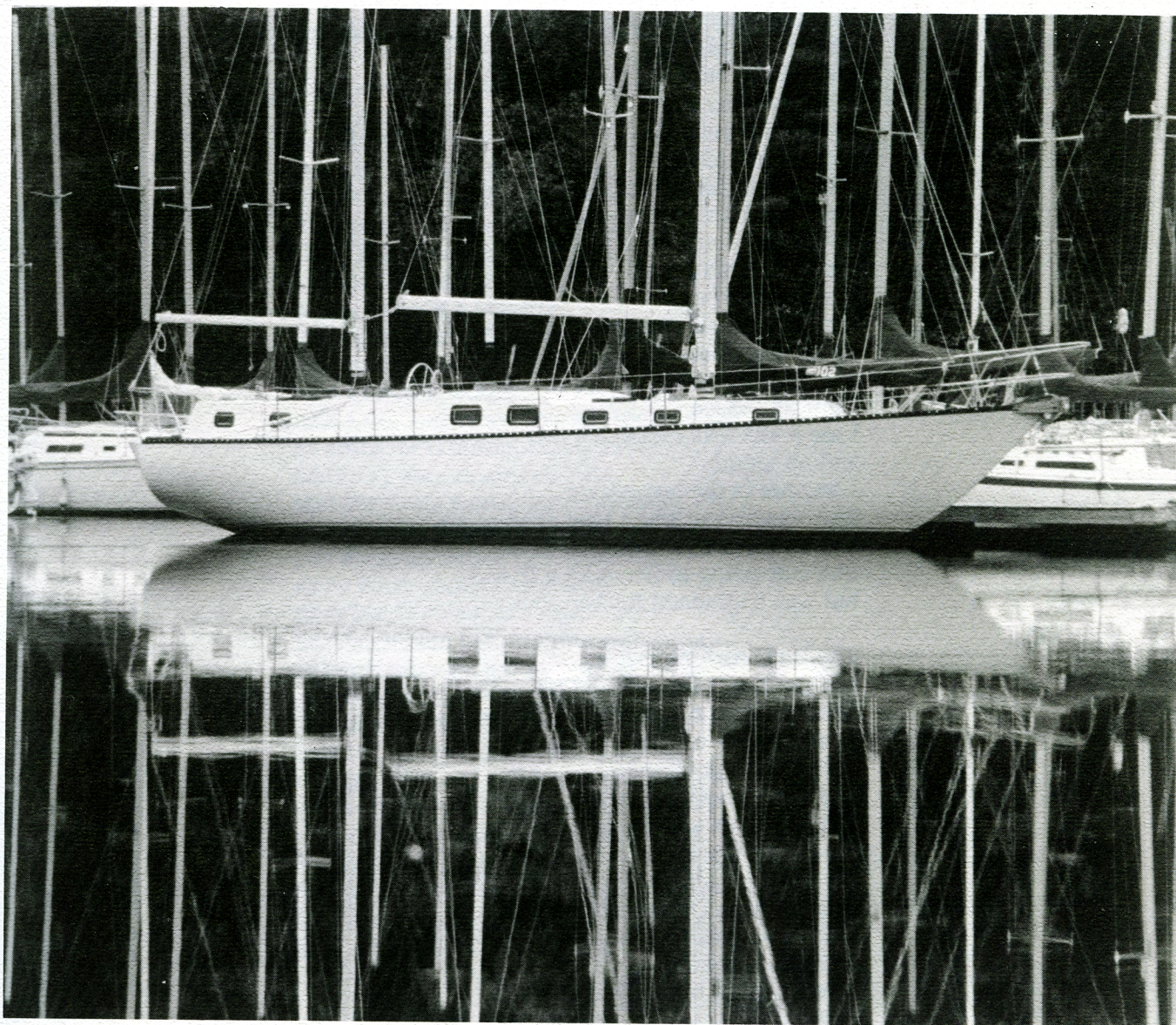
I think, for a moment, that my father is here
with the enormous Buick Elektra Estate Wagon
he loves, though it barely sputters to life
each morning, and threatens to become immobile,
but now I see the front seats of this impostor are different,
golden tan instead of dark brown, no velour up front
and vinyl in the back, a quirk my father said was smart.

I've been thinking of how matter is made up of particles;
that much I can handle, but a chemist tells me
that at some fundamental level, matter
travels in waves. He says the particles must be tiny
for you to notice it, that you would see no wave nature
in a Buick. But there have been times I'd have loved
to try diffracting my father's station wagon,
forcing it like light through two tiny slits in a wall,
seeing what patterns of destruction
wrinkle its shiny skin. I'm not proud of that;

my father keeps his engine cleaner than any man I know,
and I can't help but confess a certain pride the first time
I rode home in that car, hiding everything I could find
in the huge map pockets that lined the backs of the seats,
rolling the windows up and down, clicking the doors
locked and unlocked. At night, I was amazed
that you didn't have to turn its lights on;
the car did it for you. This car *knows*, my father said.

And it does. It keeps the flow of its particles hidden,
the quantum mechanics that keep it flowing
from one place to another-- "like you're riding on air"
is how my father likes to say it. In this parking lot, I want to
take this copy of my father's car apart, stick my hands
under its softly ticking hood, smile, and say: this boy *knows*.

-Shannon Smith



-Christopher Hyder

The Vitality of Ice

I hold a piece of ice
in my palms
and squeeze it between
my hands.
Holding the smaller ice
up to the sunlight,
water trails between my fingers
and down my arms.
I stare into the cube
and see an old man
with a nose like a banana.
He is the bum I saw downtown,
hollow eyes and greasy hair.
He carried his things
in a garbage bag
and picked half-smoked cigarettes
up off the sidewalk.

Turning the ice,
I see a girl with crooked eyes
and no mouth--
I met her in the bus station.
She was crying when I sat down
and began to talk about her father.
She was going to live with a friend,
but was frightened for her younger sisters.

The ice is melting faster
and my hands are wet and red
like the woman who lives next door.
She comes over every weekend
to borrow something,
and always stays to talk.
She works as a maid
six days a week--
her children get free lunches at school.
Even though I've never met them,
I know her oldest son is smart
and good-looking;
he spends his time reading alone.
The girl runs wild,
talking her way out of trouble,
and wants to be a gypsy.

Two weeks ago, her little boy
was hospitalized for some kind of tumor--
my neighbor didn't understand
what the doctors were telling her
and asked me to explain.
I've stopped answering my door.

-Stacy Bell

Drunk and Six Cats, London, 1880

Carefully, he waltzes to the rough
three-quarter time of a song
he half remembers; it's all
that sings him up these stairs.
If cats have nine lives, the six
who watch this awkward dance
share fifty-four between them;
his one makes fifty-five,
and with such a majority,
it's no wonder the cats
are merely tolerant. Hours before,
he'd kissed a woman. "I love you,"
he'd said, and when she whispered "yes"
so softly he'd thought he dreamed it,
he didn't once dream of this:
that the stairs would seem so long
this close to dawn. The cats
pay more attention; one looks up
as he takes another step into
their last few minutes together:
he remembers her perfume and sweat
filling his lungs, her struggling;
it was so hard to stop her crying.
The cats have all hidden themselves now,
looking smugly out of the shadows;
not one of *them* will lose a life tonight.
With one hand he reaches for the door,
the other rubs the blade in his pocket.
But in the dark, he's a step early, and he curls
like a leaf and starts to roll, the cats watching
like smiling women from the dark; he remembers
their soft skin, their soft cries, each soft "no."

-Shannon Smith

Other World

(1947) M.C. Escher

This bird was made for infinity.
I should have known from the still-life,
I should have seen in the pencil study.
No lines will contain this bird.

From now on and on what matters
is how, from here in my chaise-lounge,
I look up at a man's face and conical wings,
look up at a bull's horn trumpet,
look up at Saturn and a galaxy that spins
whether or not I remember its name.
and from this same seat,
I look down to find this bird has ears.
I am now afraid to make the crack
I'd planned about his planet.
So I look past him and his trumpet,
past the peaks and craters of his world
to the familiar moon, right of center
and as finite as a compass point.
From here, I move outward
to trace a comet's tail of burning ice
as it arcs over this bird's head, discovering
now that he's smiling at me in my chaise lounge
eyeing the curves and the colors,
eyeing my third dimension.

-Richard Seehuus

From An Octopus' Garden

Do you speak up there
under that wide open
uncovered space,
and if you do,
how do you keep the sky from falling?

I am under the sea
with the spirits of silent monks,
deaf mutes,
and others like me.
We do not speak here,
not out of respect for sacred vows
or pity for handicaps,
but because we are afraid,
afraid that the noise
will bring the whole sea down upon us.

No one misses sound.
The few who want communication
exchange letters or poems,
use sign language,
or silent prayer.
Words go up
instead of hanging in front of us,
growing bigger and uglier,
threatening the foundation of the sea.

-Laura A. Milner



-Lynn Howard

Pebble on a Gravestone

What I don't get are the pebbles:
two or three on the edge of a gravestone
like a carver's error. Maybe a Jewish woman
left the first pebble in 1938;
she had to save her coins for bread,
because her husband answered the door
six weeks ago and never came back.
Perhaps the man was Oppenheimer's
grandfather. He would have had no truck
with pebbles-- his grave has a low fence.
He and I know the dead need nothing, but his wife
must have stood by his name and needed
to choose a pebble from the fistfull she held
while she cried and prayed. It's just
that a pebble's such a low thing.
Oppenheimer's grandfather was a Ghetto Jew,
though, who knew that a pebble in the mouth
wets a dry throat. Oppenheimer himself
could have told me how my pebble had split
along the seam inside its rock; I knew enough
to know how it once was bigger than his grandfather's
gravestone. They've buried Jews between Jews
for seven hundred years, until
some gravestones rub shoulders.
if the family had stayed in Prague
Oppenheimer could have climbed into bed
with his grandson and reassured him.
I left the pebble on the gravestone,
I don't know why, because it'll fall off
and sink together with the other pebbles
into another great rock, as faceless as I am
and the grandfather and the Jewess;
I had to leave something.

-Cathy Wagner



-Lisa Blevins

Cézanne Finds his Models

In Cézanne's painting,
Three Bathers, a lazy
Afternoon sun falls
On three young women
Finishing their bath.
Two of them, sisters.
The other, a neighbor
They've known since childhood.
The servant lies sleeping
On the soft moss
Just beyond the riverbank.
The younger sister
Searches for her bracelet,
A gaudy present
From her fiancé,
The duke. She stands
Motionless in shallow
Water, peering intently
At the murky bottom,
All the while she is fretting.
Will he notice she's lost it?
"Hush up!" snaps her sister
Annoyed by her whining
And her engagement
To the wealthy young duke.
Alisa, their friend,
Sits on the bank
Combing her hair.
Her eyes are distant
As she thinks of her lover
the son of a swineherd
And so, she can't tell.
For a moment there's silence,
Then the youngest looks
Up from her searching,
Spies Cézanne and his brushes,
And lets out a scream.

-Michelle Lynn Lilly



To William Bentley (1700-1773)

I never thought I'd find you here.
Today, I almost passed you
and your neighbors, I was so lost
to the larks and bright leaves
of the country. Summers in Vermont
I'd search with my father for graves
like yours. We'd marvel at dates
like 1800, names like Hortense
Magnolia, or "died of cloritus,
Hattie May, second secretary
for the third legion." To me,
our meeting is like a secret sign,
an accident of time and place,
what you feel but can't believe,
what my father, always the scientist,
once told me on one of our country walks,
"What is happening on the wing
of a butterfly affects us now."
I was eight, ignorant of atoms
and evolutions, and I didn't believe him.

Wait. I've told you that I've been
thinking of my father, of my family,
but I haven't. All day I've been trying
not to think of Lila and Ben, the two
paraplegics at the Spring Flower
nursing home. I've been wishing
I could hold thoughts of my father instead,
for he's old too. They had planned
everything so carefully, though, slowly
sliding their limp skin onto the raw nub
of the laundry room couch. It was only
the creaking of their wheelchairs
on the newly washed floor as they struggled
to get back into them that gave them away.

I imagine you drifting through these
Vermont fields, maybe with your own father,
stopping for a moment to beat time
to the click of a cicada's wings,
to let the leaves fall around you.
How I would welcome you.
Sometimes it feels like you only call old friends
to prove you're not close any more,
that you've moved on. But I'm calling out
to you for a different reason, in an effort
to move back to my father. I lay my head
on the ground next to yours, wonder if it's too late.

-Millie Bentley



-Fielding Freed

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The Sequoya Review regrets that it was not able to publish all of the submissions it received. We hope that the contributors and others will continue to submit their work in the future.

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